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Watching Through the Kaleidoscope

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Watching Through the Kaleidoscope

Acknowledgements

Editor's Choice

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Watching Through the Kaleidoscope

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Every day I wake up and feed my body and dress up and clean my body and go outside and get in my car. It's not a list, it's one complex action, several efforts, like squeezing an empty tube of toothpaste onto a ruined brush. There are a thousand thoughts that roll through my head every second, half complete and broken like headless dolls and dull kitchen knives. The dull ones are the most dangerous, the dull ones don't do what you want them to. I am a tenant in the prison my ancestors built. I'm made dull by thousands of passes at thousands of tough ligaments. I am dangerous because I don't do what people want me to. These thoughts mean nothing, but they take up as much space as "YOU FORGOT YOUR KEYS YOU STUPID FUCKING-" and that gets exhausting through sheer volume. Spilling a glass of water is nothing compared to a leaky faucet. I am a leaky faucet: dangerous because I don't do what people want me to. I am the exposed wire, the bare wire, the screaming and sparking wire that just won't turn the light on for you, and if you come too close I might just bite. Today is the ten thousandth pass at broken bones and pulsing veins, though what I'm passing I don't know. I start my car

and the air conditioner freezes my bare knuckles. I wish I had one of those heated steering wheels, then I'd be happy.

I get angry at a lot of things and some people don't like that. I'm an even tempered person, maybe even nice, but when I see those insurance billboards I get so, so angry. They're a dull knife that passes over my mind, taking up so much space. I've been told to ignore them, to not get mad. "It's not rational." Sage advice, though I wish I could follow it. That's a lie, I do follow it. I follow it like my eyes follow the ball of a tennis match, like my eyes trace the path of the billboards as they pass in my windshield. I follow it until I'm dizzy and I'm angry again, so angry that it makes me want to cry. I know it's irrational, I know, so don't say it. You'd be angry too if it took up so much space and didn't apologize, like someone forcing your elbow off of the armrest. I want to think of proactive solutions but the only one I can think of is living in the woods and killing animals with my bare hands. At least then I'd be fighting phantoms and demons. You can shoot those; you can't shoot billboards. When I think about shooting something I shudder a little. I wish those little drifting thoughts weren't so scary. Just don't get mad, it's not rational.

I've parked my car now, which is a process by itself. The person who parked in the place I normally go is trying to slow me down. They're from Kentucky. They should go back to Kentucky. This next part is one motion too, so pay attention. Wait for the clock to turn five till and get out and walk in and clock in and walk out and get to my post. Every passing person is watching me, and I wish I could yell at all of them. There's so much candy around my post. It's there to trick people and I have to ignore it. It doesn't speak to me (I'm *not* crazy) but it has little voices that almost whisper and taunt. It's not rational to be angry at candy, but I am. The job is easy, but it twists the mind. The moment you get lost in thought another *mouth breathing asshole* comes around the corner with something they want to buy, waddling

like a child and looking at me like I'm a puddle of piss in the stairwell. I'm an associate, have a nice day, can I help you, did you find everything you need, *asshole stupid asshole don't-*, you can remove your card, have a nice day. I wish I was crazy enough for disability, but no judge would dare. What am I talking about? I'm a rational person, not like in the movies. I feel strange but not especially profound, like a black rose in a spring bouquet or a painting about rape in a middle school showcase. Where do you even house such things? So few know the TV static that passes over my vision on days like this and so many see it as cause for resignation. "Hello, I am your trusted *associate* and I demand that you ask the candy bars to stop screaming at me. Anyway, see you tomorrow."

I once watched a video of someone using a schizophrenia simulator. It was Anderson Cooper and he tried to buy a newspaper while voices in his ears told him he was worthless. He talked about how hard it was, and I told my friend I'd rather die than live like that. Boo-hoo. Now I know he was full of shit. Now I know how laughably inaccurate and meaningless it all was. Advocacy is a tricky thing to do when you have no idea what you're talking about. Schizophrenia: a name on a dusty old book, though whether it was academic or gothic I can't remember. It means "splitting of the mind" but I prefer the Japanese "integration disorder." It's a better description for the toll it takes on me. I just want to live in the woods and kill animals with my bare hands. Mental health, don't make me laugh, I'm healthier than most. I'm not deep in my feelings, I'm just watching through the kaleidoscope. I'm not sick, sickness implies cure, or that I ought to be cured. Both are false *and I'll bite you until you bleed if you try to put me in one of those —*

My break comes up and I buy a candy bar and I regret it and I eat it and I regret it. I shouldn't try to make the world quieter by giving into its demands, it's just not rational. I tried mindfulness once,

which is what secular society calls certain types of meditation – taken once daily or as needed. I hated the man’s voice. I tried to go without, but my mind was flooded with thoughtless visions, morphing little pictures, fluid forms that showed me things I’d never seen and what I could never understand. In a small scale society I’d be a shaman, carried through the village on a chair. Here, behind the register and after my break, I’m just twitchy. I’m forced to smile here. It’s no secret that big companies value money over honesty and I am to reflect that in my countenance. My teeth are displayed for the discerning customer, a knife that passes over my unwrinkled eyes, my eyes that follow every pass like a game of tennis. 10,001 10,002 10,003... I watch as the men and women walk the aisles. My body stays still, and my mind follows each and every detail until I’m out of breath and near tears.

I remember a girl I’ve only met through the stories of a friend. She didn’t know how to make movies, but my friend did. “She was over ambitious,” he said. She wrote a story about some person with schizophrenia, someone who kills the person they have a crush on. Fantasizing about killing someone you’re attracted to is only something a sane person could make up and call art. Some people think they know a lot. Some people don’t know what it’s like to watch through the kaleidoscope. She said I’m dangerous. I am dangerous, I don’t do what people want me to. I’m the tumbler girl’s raunchiest fantasy. I’m the bad boy who will cut your throat and make daddy disappointed. I’m a Halloween costume or a sexy girl with a baseball bat. I’m just plain dangerous, so topical, so subversive, so quirky and different. *Nobody understands me [hand over forehead, look off into distance]*. I’m usually pretty sex positive but your fantasies make me sick. There we go, I’m angry again, and here’s another mouth breather who wants to buy a toilet seat.

I think of a scene over and over again, one in so many movies. It’s that scene where a character holding a cake trips and plants

their face into it. I saw it happen in real life. My mother was making soup, her enthusiasm dizzying and aggravating. A vase fell from up high and shattered on the counter below; glass got into the pot. That moment of disaster echoes for hours before a reaction follows. A person sits in that moment and sometimes it's so devastating that tears cannot be produced, and speech is rendered useless. It happens when the ten thousandth pass bares down on something you've tried so hard to make happy. It happens when I pass that billboard, or when I smile, or when I'm told I'm sick, or when another talentless writer uses me as an excuse to fantasize about murder. I stand at my post with that pot of soup as I try to keep my face from showing anything, just watching through the kaleidoscope. I want to sob, like those people in the movies want to. The thing that stops them from letting it all out stops me now: It's just not rational.